

Joshua 19:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhén; thirteen cities and their villages:

Analysis

And Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhén; thirteen cities and their villages:

Beth-lebaoth (בֵּית לִבְאוֹת, "house of lionesses") takes its name from the Hebrew levi'ah (לִבְיָאָה, "lioness"), suggesting either a place where lions dwelt or a sanctuary featuring lion imagery. Lions inhabited the Jordan valley and forests of ancient Israel (Judges 14:5; 1 Samuel 17:34-37; 2 Kings 17:25), though less common in the arid Negev. The name may be metaphorical, referring to fierce inhabitants or tribal emblems. In 1 Chronicles 4:31, the city appears as Beth-biri, likely a scribal variant or alternate name.

Sharuhén (שָׂרוּחֵן) appears prominently in Egyptian records as Sharuhén, a fortified city that housed Hyksos refugees after their expulsion from Egypt around 1550 BCE. The Egyptian pharaoh Ahmose I besieged Sharuhén for three years before capturing it, demonstrating the city's strategic importance and formidable defenses. That this ancient stronghold was given to diminished Simeon is ironic—they inherited a city of historic significance but lacked the strength to fully develop it.

The summary **thirteen cities and their villages** concludes the first list. The Hebrew chatser (חֲצֵר, "villages" or "settlements") refers to unwalled agricultural communities dependent on fortified cities for protection. The specific count of thirteen establishes an inventory of Simeon's inheritance, though verses 7-8 will add four more cities, creating textual tension about whether the total is thirteen or

seventeen—likely explained by different categorizations or later redactional additions.

Historical Context

Beth-lebaath's location is uncertain, possibly identical to Bethul (verse 4) or a distinct nearby settlement. The Negev's sparse population during Iron Age I meant many small settlements left minimal archaeological traces. The region supported pastoral nomadism more than fixed agriculture, explaining the emphasis on "villages" (unwalled settlements) rather than fortified cities.

Sharuhén has been identified with Tel el-Ajjul near Gaza or Tel esh-Sharia. Egyptian records from the 18th Dynasty describe the extended siege following the Hyksos expulsion (c. 1550-1547 BCE), making Sharuhén one of the few Canaanite cities whose ancient name and history are confirmed by extra-biblical sources. The Hyksos were Asiatic rulers who controlled Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period (1650-1550 BCE); their expulsion triggered military campaigns into Canaan to prevent future incursions.

By assigning Sharuhén to Simeon, Joshua allocated a city with centuries of military history to a tribe lacking the population and resources to maintain such a stronghold. This pattern—Simeon receiving valuable territory they couldn't fully utilize—facilitated their absorption into Judah. Archaeological evidence suggests the Negev remained sparsely populated during early Iron Age I, consistent with Simeon's weak position. The tribe's gradual disappearance from biblical records reflects their failure to thrive in this challenging inheritance.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does Simeon's inheritance of significant cities they couldn't maintain teach about the difference between receiving God's blessings and having the faithfulness to steward them properly?
2. How does Beth-lebath ("house of lionesses") ironically contrast with Simeon's weak tribal position, and what does this reveal about the gap between our naming/claiming and our actual spiritual strength?
3. In what ways might we be given spiritual resources or opportunities (like Sharuhem's strategic importance) that we lack the discipline or community to fully develop?

Interlinear Text

וְיָת	לְבָא וְת	וְשָׂרוּחַ	עָרִים	שְׁלֹש	עֶשְׂרֵה
H0	And Bethlebaath	and Sharuhem	cities	thirteen	H6240
	H1034	H8287	H5892	H7969	
וְחִצְרֵיהֶן:					
and their villages					
H2691					

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